- The Beginning of the Conquest of the Air -

- - THE OUTLOOK - -

Air travel in America began May 29, 1910.

So will read the history books the children of tomorrow con, doting, as they undoubtedly will, the beginning of the Age of Air from that memorable day when half a ton of machinery, guided by a daring aviator, rose by its own power high in air at Albany, and, in far less time than the fastest train could make it, descended safely in the metropolis one hundred and fifty miles away.

This wonderful Albany-New York flight of Glenn Hammond Curtiss was na haphazard undertaking, but a carefully planned journey. Before essaying it he had selected the spot near Poughkeepsie where he intended to make the first of the two stops allowed him. He landed in that exact spot one hour and twenty-four minutes after leaving Albany. He had selected as a second landing place a grassy knoll at Two Hundred and Fourteenth Street, New York City. He landed there exactly one hour and nine minutes after leaving Poughkeepsie. From his second landing, although by reaching the limits of New York City he had won the ten-thousand-dollar prize offered by the New York World, he flew in eighteen minutes to Governors Island, where he brought his aeroplane safely to the ground just in front of the aeroplane shed there.

In making this flight of one hundred and fifty miles in two hours and fifty-one minutes, maintaining an average speed of 52.63 miles per hour, he not only broke all records for fast flying, he not only made the longest flight but one ever made anywhere in the world, but he demonstrated successfully for the first time the possibility of aeroplanes being used in travel between cities. The success of his flight aroused intense interest in aviation in all parts of the country, and resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars being offered with in a few days for inter-city flight.

As was said at the banquet given to him at the Hotel Astor the second evening after his achievement, what he did that day rightly entitled him to an honorable place in history along with the intrepid Henry Hudson, who discovered the great river, and with Robert Fulton, who traveled up it from New York to Albany in the first steamboat. As one of the speakers put it, "One hundred years from now we will be having the Hudson-Fulton-Curtiss Centenary Celebration."

Viewed as a spectacle, there never has been witnessed a more thrilling sight. Those who saw the start from Van Rensselaer Island, just below the city of Albany, were profoundly impressed. Said Jacob L. Ten Eyck, the official starter for the Aero Club of America, in describing Curtiss's departure: "One minute we were looking at a pile of machinery on the grass, the next we were gazing blankly into the sky, wondering where it had gone. There was a sudden whir of the engine, a dash across the field, and then like a huge bird Curtiss in his aeroplane rose gracefully in the air, circling about so as to come within the limits of Albany. Then in an incredibly short time he shot up to a height of seven hundred feet, and, while we were straining our eyes in wonder, passed from our sight in the direction of New York."

Curtiss several days before had taken his biplane up the river, and had set it up on Van Rensselaer Island. He was ready to start Thursday morning. He was ready Friday morning. He was ready Saturday morning. Each time the weather seemed unfavorable, and he announced his intention of waiting until conditions were ideal. In the populous valley below, where hourly bulletins told the repeated delays, a feeling of doubt began to spread. There were many who believed that he never would attempt the flight, and that, if he did, he would not succeed. For more than a year ten thousand dollars had been awaiting the first man to fly between the two cities. The New York World had offered it to mark the great Hudson-Fulton Celebration in 1909, with the idea of testing the possibility of duplicating in the air the historic trip of Fulton's first steamboat. Two men in dirigible balloons, Captain Thomas Scott Baldwin and George B. Tomlinson, had tried it in September, 1909, and both had quickly come to grief, one in the Hudson off Spuyten Duyvil, and the other at White Plains. Recalling these failures, disbelieving because of the delays, remembering the mountains that wall the Hudson and the treacherous blasts that sweep around Storm King, many a person and many a paper proclaimed, "He'll never do it."

Even though Curtiss as a motorcyclist had proved his skill and daring already as the record-holder of the fastest mile ever made by man, even though at Rheims he had won honors from the world as the fastest of aviators, even though he was just home from Los Angeles with flying prizes won there, many doubted his intention, and one newspaper in the Hudson Valley in its headlines called him "a four-flusher," and advised its readers that no start would be attempted.

Then Sunday morning came. By six o'clock perhaps fifty persons had gathered at Van Rensselaer Island. Hardly a breath of air was stirring. The sun had risen on a cloudless sky. Curtiss kissed his wife good-by, and she hastened off to board a special train that was to attempt to follow the aeroplane. Curtiss donned a sweater, strapped a life-preserver around his waist, and took his seat. A mechanician cranked the engine. Curtiss jerked a lever. The machine glided along the ground for perhaps fifty yards, and then rose steadily, gracefully in the air. He circled about to come within the limits of Albany, and then steered up high in the sky and headed south. He was twenty-one miles away before the special train caught up with him. At Hudson, twenty-nine miles distant, he was still flying high. The aeroplane moved steadily save for a slight pitching as the aviator used a foot pump every five minutes to replenish the oil in the cups. As he approached Kingston he descended to a lower level—four hundred feet above the water.

"It was hard to judge he distance," said Mr. Curtiss afterward. "The only standard of measurement I had was the shadow of the aeroplane on the water. I don't know how high or how low I flew."

When he reached Poughkeepsie, he crossed the Poughkeepsie Bridge two hundred feet up in the air. The town fire-bell heralded his coming, and early-rising residents already were rushing to the Grill farm, where he was to land. As he brought his aeroplane to earth there were several persons there, among them several automobile parties. Calm and cool, as unruffled as if stepping out of a street car, Curtiss as he landed, called out, "Where's that oil and gasoline?"

It wasn't there. Somehow, despite all his well-laid plans, there had been a slip-up. But the lack was quickly supplied. Every automobilist present pressed forward to offer his supplies. Curtiss filled his tanks and tightened up a nut that had worked loose. He had landed at 8:26 a. m. At exactly 9:26 he started again for New York.

As he flew past Storm King a gust of wind swept down the mountain-side and nearly tipped the aeroplane over. In the speeding train below, his wife, in anxiety, clutched the hand of a woman friend, hardly daring to breathe, as she saw the tiny craft careen before the blast. It was the worst moment of the trip, but Curtiss managed to right his machine in time to prevent the death-bringing downward swoop that to those below seemed inevitable, and sped onward.

The great Metropolitan Tower loomed up in the distance. He knew he was nearing the city. He noted with alarm that his supply of oil was almost gone. He slowed down his eight cylinder engine and watched it carefully. It had been his intention to make Governors Island, in New York Harbor, without another stop, but now he saw that this was impossible. If his oil gave out, it meant the sudden stoppage of his engines and a plunge downward to certain death in the bottom of the Hudson. He headed for the little grassy knoll at Two Hundred and Fourteenth Street, and brought his machine down there in safety, hurriedly leaping from his seat to prevent the machine from running down into a swamp. There was no one there, but some amazed boys came running up from a motor-boat landing near by. One of them had formerly worked for Curtiss. They quickly brought him the oil he needed so badly.

It was 10:45 a. m. when he landed there. As soon as he had his machine safe he hurried to a telephone some distance away, and notified the World of his arrival. The prize of ten thousand dollars was won. It was unnecessary for him to fly farther.

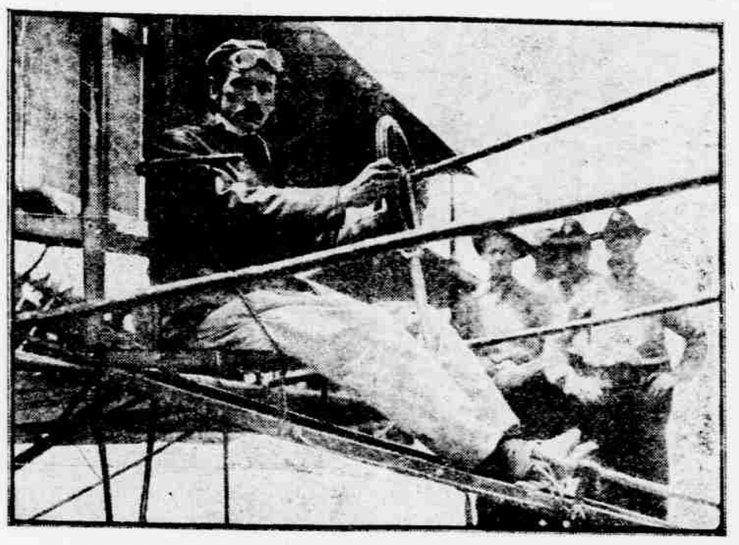
Then Curtiss did a sportsmanlike thing that won him the unbounding admiration of all New York. Even before the news had spread that he landed in the upper part of the city, he came sailing down the Hudson over the heads of a multitude gathered in Battery Park, and on the parade ground of Governors Island landed with almost military accuracy just in front of the aeroplane shed. Discipline for the moment was forgotten. Uniformed officers and soldiers in khaki joined with the officers wives and servants in a mad race to reach the spot.

Still as unruffled as if he had come from Albany in the ordinary way, Curtiss, after a brief reception in the Officers' Club, came to New York. On his way to the ferry he met his wife, just arrived from the special train. With a proud cry of "Oh, Glenn!" she rushed into his arms. An hour later, after the party had had luncheon—for Curtiss until after the flight was over had taken nothing but some toast and coffee—a check for ten thousand dollars was handed to him in the World office, a well-earned prize for his wonderful feat.

His Albany-New York flight, while not quite as long as Paulhan's London-to-Manchester flight a few days before, was far more wonderful. It was done in far shorter time and over a much more difficult course. The biplane in which Curtiss traveled was the lightest and smallest that had ever carried man in the air. Equipped with a four-cylinder engine, its weight was barely five hundred pounds. For this journey, however, it carried an eight-cylinder engine, a hundred pounds of gasoline, thirty pounds of oil, and steel pontoons to keep it afloat in case of a descent into the water, bringing its total weight up to nearly a thousand pounds. In spite of the handicap of the added weight, it made the speediest journey an aeroplane ever has made in extended flight.

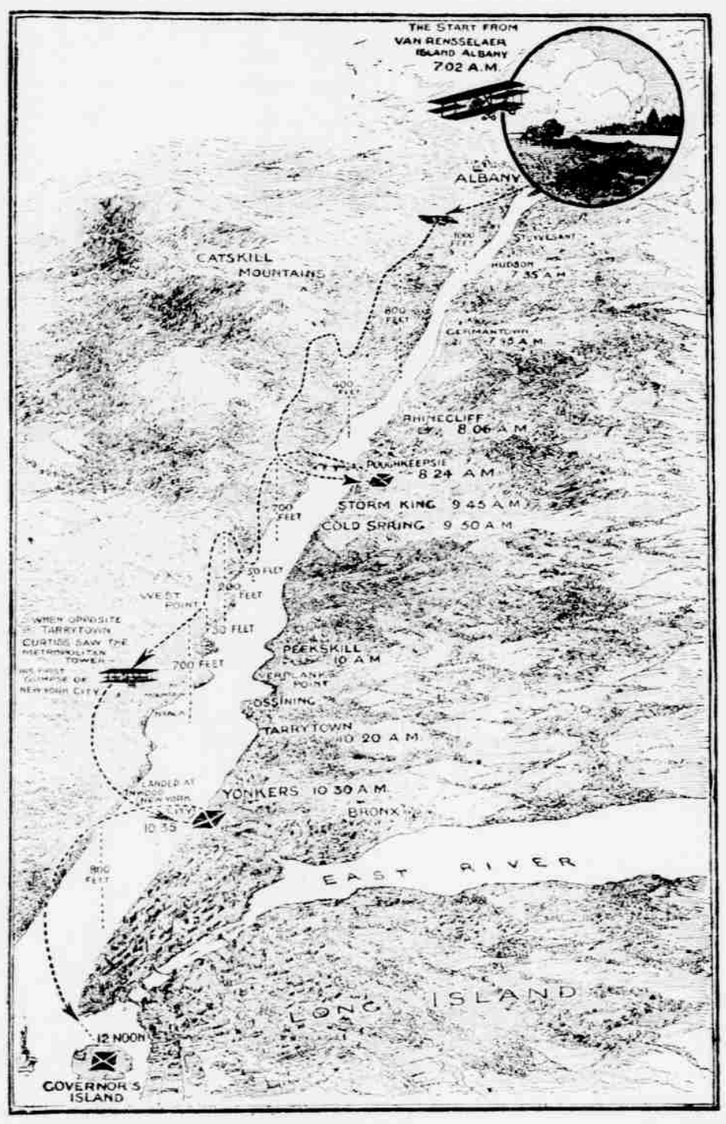
But, far above and beyond all this, the Curtiss flight convinced the Nation where the aeroplane was born of its commercial practicability; it fanned to fever heat public interest in aviation as a sport, as a business, as a scientific study.

It proved that the Age of the Air had really begun. One man had traveled and all men soon might travel from city to city straight through the air. It brought conviction to the belief that some day not far distant winged ships might fly aeross the seas. It suggested a new instrument of war against whose attacks dreadnoughts would be powerless. It was not only a triumph for aviation and a milestone in progress, but a harbinger of universal peace.



GLENN HAMMOND CURTISS.

APPROACHING GOVERNORS ISLAND FOR THE FINAL DESCENT.



A BIRDSEYE VIEW OF THE FLIGHT FROM ALBANY TO NEW YORK.